

BEHAVIORS IMPORTANT FOR  
SCHOOL SUCCESS AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS

by

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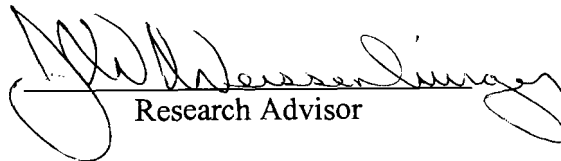
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**ABSTRACT**

In the past, there has been research on teachers' views regarding the importance of certain social skills for success in schools. However, little is known about the perceptions of parents regarding the social skills of students. This research was conducted to determine the perceptions of parents regarding the importance of certain social skills and their relations to school success for students in a district in Wisconsin. A total of 84 participants responded. A modified version of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) was used to evaluate the perceptions of parents.

Results indicated parents in a small regional district in Wisconsin have different views on the importance of social skills based on the gender of the respondent. These differences were found in: a) appropriately questioning rules that may be unfair; b) responding appropriately to peer pressure; and c) responding appropriately when pushed/hit by children. Further, following

directions, attending to directions, and controlling temper in conflict situations received the highest ratings by the total respondent group. Further research needs to be conducted examine the perceptions of parents of social skills in the schools.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

In the past, research has been conducted regarding teachers' perceptions on the importance of certain social skills and their relations to school success. Elliott and Gresham (1987) summarize the consequences for children with social skill deficits that can be both immediate and gradual. However, the behavioral expectations of the teacher may not be the same behavioral expectations that are valued in the home (Galloway & Porath, 1997). There is less known about the perceptions of parents regarding the social skills of students in the classroom.

Two of the most important sources of information regarding young children's social skills are parents and teachers (Ruffalo & Elliott, 1997). In a study conducted by Wentzel (1991; 1993), results indicated teachers believed social and academic skills are mutually interdependent. There was a contradiction between teachers and parents on their views of social skills (Ruffalo & Elliott, 1997; Galloway & Porath, 1997).

As stated in Elliott and Gresham (1987), social skills generally are assessed by adults, mainly teachers. Assessment procedures used in assessing social skills include ratings by others, sociometric techniques, self report measures, and behavioral role playing (Gresham, 1985; Gresham & Elliott 1984; Elliott & Gresham, 1987). Elliott and Gresham (1987) also include behavioral interviews and naturalistic observations as sources of social skill information. Teacher perceptions are generally measured through the use of psychological scales, rating scales, and behavior checklists (Robinson & Noble, 1991), whereas parent perceptions are generally assessed by rating scales, questionnaires, and interviews (Galloway & Porath, 1997).

According to Parke (as cited in Eisenberg, Fabes, and Murphy, 1996), children are socialized by parents and others in three primary ways. These ways include indirectly influencing behaviors through interactions with others, directly teaching about the rules and



regulations, and regulating opportunities to learn about emotions by controlling exposure. There are a number of findings connecting academic achievement with social skills, and many believe that social skills are to be nurtured and developed in the schools (Elliott & Gresham, 1987). Further, social skills have been found to influence functioning in society as an adult (Elliott & Gresham, 1987). Socially competent children have been found to be accepted by their peers, judged well by their significant others, have academic competence, contain an adequate self-concept or self-esteem, and have adequate psychological adjustment (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

A review of the literature indicates that there are variations in the perceptions of teachers and parents with regard to social competence (Ruffalo & Elliott, 1997). There are a number of speculations as to why such variations may occur. Some of these include standards of judgment (Terman, 1926; as cited in Galloway & Porath, 1997), situation-specificity (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987; Ruffalo & Elliott, 1997) measurement issues, social class differences (Cornell, Delcourt, Bland, Goldber, & Oram, 1994; Janos & Robinson, 1985), and frames of reference (Robinson & Noble, 1991; Galloway & Porath, 1997). According to Haager and Vaughn (as cited in Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003), little research has been conducted to examine parents' perceptions of the social skills needed for success in school.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Since parents primarily socialize most children, knowing the behavioral expectations of parents is important. Therefore, this study will examine the behaviors or social skills important for school success as perceived by parents through the use of a modified version of the *Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)*. Two research questions were addressed in the study:

1. According to parents, which social skills are the most important for students to achieve success in the classroom?

2. Does the gender of the parent influence their perceptions regarding the importance of specific social skills for success in the classroom?

Therefore, this study will examine the behaviors important for school success as perceived by parents.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study is to identify the perceptions of parents regarding the importance of certain social skills and their relation to school success for students in Wisconsin as measured by a modified version of the *Social Skills Rating System - Teacher Form (SSRS-T)*.

### *Assumptions of the Study*

It can be assumed that parents will perceive some social skills as being more important than other social skills for success in school.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Behavioral Interviews* – Interviews used to define social behaviors in observable terms by identifying the antecedent, sequential, and consequent conditions surrounding target behaviors and setting up observable situations around a target behavior (Elliott & Gresham, 1987)

*Modeling* – “A basic learning process in which individuals acquire new behaviors by observing others and putting those behaviors into action” (Baron, 1995, p. 571).

*Naturalistic Observation* – Analyzing behavior in natural settings through observation at the time the behavior occurs (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

*Role Playing* - A technique used to bring a skill into focus by taking on an identity that differs from one's current behavior (Gladding, 1999).

*Social Skills* - Acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively and avoid socially unacceptable responses (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

*Social Skill Deficits* – Characteristics of children who have not acquired the necessary social skills to interact appropriately with others or have failed to learn a critical step in the performance of the skill (cited in Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

*Sociometric Techniques* – Assessment techniques that determine which children are poorly accepted, rejected, or unpopular. Two basic types are peer nominations and peer ratings (cited in Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

### *Limitations of the Study*

One limitation of the present study was that the study was conducted within one small school district of Wisconsin. The results should not be generalized to more urban populations. Other limitations are that the participants were primarily women and Caucasian.

### *Methodology*

Other questions raised in this study are the impact of having more male participants. Also, the importance of a needs assessment in determining the importance of parent's in schools.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The following literature review will discuss social competence. Social skill definitions, the development of social skills, social skill instructional techniques, and social skill assessments also will be addressed. In addition, the ramifications of poorly developed social skills are discussed.

### *Social Skills*

According to Elliot and Gresham (1987) there have been several definitions of social skills posited by theorists. When combined, they make up three groupings. These groupings include peer acceptance, behavioral skills, and social validity. Peer acceptance is when a child is accepted by peers, and, therefore, is considered socially skilled. However, this definition is difficult to measure as the specific behaviors that lead to peer acceptance and/or rejection are difficult to identify.

In the behavioral definition, inappropriate social skills include behaviors that are situation-specific with a maximum likelihood of a punishment reaction because of the behavior (Elliott & Gresham, 1987). An advantage to this definition is that specific behaviors can be identified. However, these particular behaviors may not be the behaviors that are significant in our society at the present time.

Social validity is defined by Wolf (1978) as the validation of the works by behaviorists on three levels. These three levels include the significance of the goals, the appropriateness of the procedures, and the importance of the effects. Questionnaires can be used to gather opinions about interventions (Kazdin, 1977; as cited in Hume, Bellini, and Pratt, 2005). Social validity is a broad definition encompassing both peer relations and behaviors (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

Yet another definition of social skills is provided by Haager and Vaughn (1995) and Sugai and Lewis (1996) (as cited in Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003). This definition states social skills are comprised of communication skills, problem solving skills, decision-making skills, assertiveness, the ability to manage one's behavior, and the ability to manage group interactions with peers and others.

In a study conducted by Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003), parents defined social skills as getting along with others and demonstrating traits of character such as respect, responsibility, caring, empathy, and motivation. Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003) placed these traits into the broad categories of interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, and moral development. Specifically, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills included the skills of self-awareness, self-control of emotions, empathy, and getting along with others. Moral development consisted of character, motivation, and self-efficacy.

The importance of social skill competence is evident in that social dysfunction can be a symptom of a number of emotional and behavioral disorders (Dodge, 1989). Children with poor peer relationships often report higher levels of conflict, betrayal, and lower levels of caring and intimacy (Parker & Asher, 1993). Not all children adequately acquire socially acceptable learned behaviors; and, therefore, these children may experience negative relationships with adults and peers (Gresham & Elliott, 1984). Untreated social skill deficits can lead to peer rejections, poor interactions with teachers and family, and emotional difficulties (Warnes, Sheridan, Geske, & Warnes, 2003).

#### *Development of Social Skills*

According to Bandura (1989), prosocial skills develop through complex transactions between an individual and other's which result in personal health. These prosocial behaviors are

a key component of social competence (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000) and contribute to the development of positive relationships. Appropriate and inappropriate models can negatively or positively influence development of prosocial behaviors (Sroufe, Cooper, & DeHart; as cited in Parrila, Ma, Fleming, & Rinaldi, 2002). Person-environment interactions, family, school, and peers are important in influencing individual characteristics. Chess and Thomas (as cited in Parrila et al., 2002) point out that goodness or a poorness of fit with one's environment are of major importance. A child's early experiences in life can help develop self-esteem, opportunities for success, social skills, and problem solving skills (Rutter, 1987).

According to many, a supportive parenting style is one in which children are comforted and encouraged to discuss their negative emotions (Eisenburg & Fabes, 1992; Hoffman, 1983; Eisenburg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996). Supportive parenting styles help children to express emotions in socially acceptable ways. Supportive parenting builds the child's competence and ability to control negative emotions. Furthermore, conflict in the home can result in emotional insecurity, thus affecting arousal and adjustment. This insecurity can stem particularly from a lack of support with emotional reactions such as fears, sadness, and anxiety. When negative affective states are experienced by children who are offered a supportive parenting style, those children can feel positive about their social relationships and become emotionally secure. Supportive parental responses included the following: expressing emotions, comforting, and helping the child to deal with the problem at hand.

In a study conducted by Eisenberg and Fabes (as cited in Eisenburg et al., 1996), three negative parental responses were identified: minimizing negative emotions, punitive reactions, and parental distress. For example, Roberts and Strayer's study (as cited in Eisenburg, et al.,

1996) found that when a child's negative emotions are suppressed, this negative affect and the unregulated response might be stored in memory that may be evoked again by a similar situation. Avoidant coping, inappropriate coping, anger, and low social competence were negative responses leading to deficits in social functioning on the part of the child.

### *Teaching in the Schools*

Cartledge (2005) pointed out there is little evidence of the systematic teaching of social skills in the schools even though appropriate social skills are crucial for the success of an academic system. Furthermore, according to Cartledge (2005), schools need to teach to the developmental level of the child, and social skill training should be implemented throughout the course of a year. Brieman and Welsh (2000) stated that teachers need to be prepared to address social skills from early education through the child's learning experience, arguing that the characteristics of social skills in children vary significantly depending on developmental levels, as does the type of assessment.

As stated in Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003), there is more pressure to meet the demands of educational standards and academic assessments in today's schools. However, social and emotional skills also need to be addressed (Pray, Hall, & Markley, 1992). Parents have suggested such activities as teacher modeling, student-teacher interactions, collaborating with parents, and incorporating social skills into all areas of schooling to help teach social skills to students along with the academics (Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003).

### *Assessing Social Skills*

According to Gresham (1985) and Gresham and Elliott (1984), some of the most practical ways to evaluate social skills is through sociometric techniques, self-report inventories, reports by others, and behavioral role-playing. These tools are both easy to administer and take little

time. Other techniques include behavioral interviews and naturalistic observations (Gresham, 1983).

### *Sociometric Techniques*

Sociometric techniques help determine a child's popularity, acceptance, or rejection. Sociometric measures can include peer nominations and peer ratings. As an example, in a study conducted by Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O'Neal, and Cairns (2003), participants were asked to identify the three classmates they liked the most and the least. Sociometric status was conducted following the methodology of Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982). A social preference score was assigned to each participant by subtracting their least liked score from their most liked score. Participants were further categorized into sociometrically popular, sociometrically rejected, sociometrically neglected, and sociometrically average groups.

### *Self-Report Inventory*

One example of a self-report inventory is the *Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS*; Pianta, 2001). The *STRS* is a self-report instrument consisting of 15 items rated on a five point Likert-type scale. The *STRS* assesses a teacher's perception of her relationship with a particular student (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). The ratings are further grouped into conflict and closeness subscales. The *STRS* inventory has a statically significant test-retest reliability and high internal consistency for both of the subscales (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

### *Ratings by Others*

Several social skill assessments utilize tools that rely on ratings by others (i.e., the teacher or parent). For example, the *California Preschool Social Competency Scale* (Levine, Elzey, & Lewis, 1970) is a scale used in assessing preschool aged children (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). This scale contains 30 items assessing preschool children and their social competencies.



Another rating scale developed from the *Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) is the *Social Skills Questionnaire (SSQ)* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The *SSQ* contains 38 items covering four skill areas: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). A three point scale of scoring is used describing how often the behavior is exhibited. The *SSQ* has a high level of internal consistency (median = .90) and test-retest reliability (.75 to .88).

The *Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE)* (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996) and the first grade version called the *Classroom Observation System – First Grade (COS-1)* (NICHD-ECCRN, 2002) are based on observations of children in classrooms for a period of two to three hours, with ratings given on a four point scale ranging from one to four and on a seven point scale that has equivalent endpoints for first grade (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Ratings are given for self-reliance, positive affect, and attention to objects or activities for preschool. For first grade, child self-reliance and positive affect are averaged. Pearson correlations ranged from .74 to .94 for these measures.

Peer groups are identified using the methodology of Cairns, Perrin, and Cairns (1985) in the use of *Social Cognitive Maps (SCM)* (Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O’Neal, & Cairns, 2003). Participants are asked, “Are there some kids in your school who hang around together a lot? Who are they?” There is high short-term test-retest reliability of peer groups (90% of the groups maintain members for period of 3 weeks) for the *SCM* assessment.

The *Interpersonal Competency Scale – Teacher (ICS-T)* (Farmer, Estell, Bishop, O’Neal, & Cairns, 2003) is an 18-item questionnaire that uses a seven point Likert-type scale completed by teachers. Scores are broken down into subscales of Aggressive, Popular, Academic,

Affiliative, and Olympian. The test-retest reliability is moderately high over three weeks (.80-.92). The median test-retest reliability is .81 for girls and .87 for boys for this measure.

The *Teacher Rating of Social Skills (TROSS)* scale was developed by Gresham and Elliott in 1985. The scale consists of 50 items with a four factor scale rated by teachers on three dimensions of often true, sometimes true, and never true. The scale reportedly has a stable structure, requires less time for completion, and pinpoints target behaviors (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

A scale designed to be used in professional and family settings by professionals to assess social skills is the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The *SSRS* provides a broad assessment of social skills including academic competence and problem behavior (Benes, 1990). The *SSRS* can be used with children aged preschool through grade 12. A Parent Form, Teacher Form, and Student Form are available. The Parent Form asks the parent or guardian to rate the child on a 3-point scale to determine the frequency of the behavior and the importance of the behavior. The Teacher Form is completed by an individual knowing the child for at least two months. The same 3-point scales are used for frequency and importance of the behavior. There are two Student Forms for grades 3-6 and grades 7-12, and the Student Forms rely on self-ratings. The same scales are used for both grade levels with the exception of the importance scale being eliminated for grades 3-6. Another feature of the *SSRS* is the Assessment-Intervention Record (AIR). The AIR is used to combine the information gained from the Parent, Teacher, and Student Forms. It provides information on the student's strengths, weaknesses, and areas of concern. There is a high level of homogeneity among items. The Teacher Form is the most reliable psychometrically of the eight scales (Furlong & Karno, 1990). The Parent Form is moderate in reliability and the two Student Forms should be used carefully. The Total Score of

the Student Form has adequate reliability; however, the social skills subscales are not reliable for individual interpretation.

According to Paget (1999; as cited in Gagnon & Nagle, 2004), play-based assessment provides important information on developmental skills, parent-child relations, learning, and development. The *Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS)* (Fantuzzo, Mendez, & Tighe, 1998; Fantuzzo, Sutton-Smith, Coolahan, Manz, Canning, & Debnam, 1995; as cited in Gagnon & Nagle, 2004) is a rating scale used to differentiate children with positive peer relations and those with less positive peer relations based on observations of the child during play. The teacher version and the parent version are identical and consist of 32 items. The following three factors emerge: Play Interaction, Play Disruption, and Play Disconnection. The *PIPPS* has demonstrated validity with inner city preschoolers with minority status.

The *Social Behavior Assessment (SBA)* was developed by Stephens (1978). This scale has 136 social skills that are rated on a three point Likert-type scale by teachers (Elliott & Gresham, 1987). There is no reliability or validity data, however, and the *SBA* is reportedly time consuming for teachers to complete (Edelbrock, 1983; as cited in Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

### *Behavioral Interviews*

Behavioral interviews are one the most frequently used forms of assessment in early intervention (Gresham, 1983). They help to define the social behaviors in observable terms, identify the conditions surrounding the behavior, and design ways to measure the target behavior.

### *Naturalistic Observations*

Naturalistic observations are one of the most valid methods of assessing social skills (Gresham, 1983). Naturalistic observations are a means of analyzing antecedent events,

behavioral sequences and consequences that may influence inappropriate social behaviors (Maag, 1989; as cited in Mercer, 1992). Observations of the behavior can include teacher-student interactions in the classroom, the playground setting, or any natural environment for a child. The behavior can be measured at the time it occurs and can help in establishing a means for measuring and recording target behaviors.

In summary, there are a number of social skill definitions. The development of social skills and the instructional techniques used in the schools to teach social skills are important components in the academic process. Evaluating or assessing specific social skills in the schools and home environments are helpful in determining prosocial behaviors and social skill deficits, and a variety of assessment tools have been developed to assist educators and parents in the identification process.

### Chapter III: Methodology

This study will examine the behaviors or social skills important for school success as perceived by parents through the use of a modified version of the *Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)*. Two research questions were addressed in the study:

1. According to parents, which social skills are the most important for students to achieve success in the classroom?
2. Does the gender of the parent influence their perceptions regarding the importance of specific social skills for success in the classroom?

This section will include information on the participant selection and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations.

#### *Participant Selection and Description*

The volunteering participants in the study were 84 parents in the Menomonie School District of Wisconsin. All of the respondents had children at the elementary level. Four hundred eighty eight students were randomly selected from a list of 1,201 students provided by the Administrative Services Center of the School District of the Menomonie Area. Eighty-four parents out of 488 completed and returned their survey, yielding a response rate of 17.2% (refer to Table 1 for more specific information about the demographic breakdown of the respondents).

#### *Instrumentation*

Parents' perceptions regarding social skills important for school success were measured using a modified version of the *Social Skills Rating System - Teacher Form (SSRS)* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The unmodified version of the test was developed by Frank Gresham and Stephan Elliot and published in 1990 by the American Guidance Service. The inventory scale is appropriate for ages K-12. The test assesses three developmental levels: preschool, K-6, and 7-

12. For the purposes of this study, the elementary developmental level (K-6) was used. Subscales of the scale allow for the evaluation of cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. The *SSRS* provides a broad assessment that can affect teacher-student relations, peer acceptance, and academic performance (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The *SSRS* emphasizes positive behaviors, or prosocial skills, potential problem behaviors, and academic competence using parent, teacher, and student rating scales.

The standard version of the *SSRS* contains 30 items. The Likert-style response modality consists of "how often" the social skill occurs in the classroom and "how important" the social skill is to the classroom teacher.

As indicated, a modified version of the *SSRS* was used for this study. The study utilized the entire pool of the original 30 items from the *SSRS*. However, for the purposes of this study, the response modality of "how often" was omitted (see Appendix for permission to modify the document from AGS). Each item only assessed the importance of the social skill to the parent. Parents were instructed to rate "how important" they perceived a particular behavior to be in their children's classrooms. Ratings ranged from 1 = not important to 5 = critical.

The unmodified *SSRS* has an internal consistency of .90 to .94 for social skills, and .82 to .85 for problem behaviors. The coefficient alpha reliabilities range from .87 to .93 for social skills in females, .85 to .94 for social skills in males, .79 to .86 for problem behaviors in females, and .77 to .89 for problem behaviors in males. Overall, the reliability of the *SSRS* is good (Benes, 1995).

The criterion-related validity coefficients range from -.15 to .73 for social skills, .01 to .57 for problem behaviors, and .37 to .72 for academics. Correlations for social skills and problem behaviors range from about .60 to .80. According to Gresham (1990), consistent

evidence exists for the construct validity based on developmental changes and sex differences, internal consistency, correlations with other tests, factor analyses, convergent and discrimination validity, and group separation.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Four hundred eighty-eight randomly selected parents of children in the Menomonie School District of Wisconsin received an introductory letter containing an agreement/permission statement, an informed consent statement, a set of directions, and the modified version of the SSRS. The letters were mailed to the homes of the students. The informed consent statement stated the respondents could refuse to participate at any time. The participants were asked to complete the modified form of the SSRS, respond to the demographic items, and send the completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope to the researcher. The participants then were thanked for their participation.

#### *Data Analysis*

A total of eighty-four questionnaires were returned. After questionnaires were returned, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent *t*-test analyses to compare gender differences item by item.

#### *Limitations*

Limitations include that the study was conducted within one small school district of Wisconsin. The results can not be generalized to larger populations. Other limitations are that the participants returning the surveys were primarily women and Caucasian.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter reports the results in relation to the research questions. A discussion of the findings is presented in the subsequent chapter.

In general, the responses to the parent demographic items indicate congruence based on gender. Demographics based on male and females are depicted in Table 1. A majority of respondents were Caucasian and female<sup>1</sup>. The average number of children for respondents is depicted in Table 4. The mean number of children in the family was 2.90, with a median of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 1.453.

Parent perceptions of the social skills that were deemed most important for students to achieve success in the classroom were analyzed. The mean, standard deviations, and rank order of social skills as perceived by parents are reported in Table 2. The top three pooled social skills were: a) follows directions, b) attends to directions, and c) controls temper in conflict situations w/adults.

An independent *t* test analysis for equality of means was conducted to test for significant differences based on whether the gender of the parent influenced their perceptions regarding the importance of specific social skills for success in the classroom. A statistical analysis of the results indicated significant differences by gender regarding three social skills. Findings indicate differences between males and females regarding appropriately questioning rules that may be unfair  $t(82) = -2.48, p < .05$  (two-tailed); responds appropriately to peer pressure  $t(82) = -2.85, p < .01$  (two-tailed); and responds appropriately when pushed/hit by children  $t(81) = -2.43, p < .05$ . Female parents or caretakers perceived these social skills as more important than the males for success in the classroom.



### *Summary Statement*

Results from the proceeding data analysis indicated that the majority of respondents had families with two to three children. Important social skills consisted of following and attending to directions as well as controlling temper. Differences were found based on gender of the respondent and their perception of the importance of social skills on the following questions:

- a) Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.
- b) Responds appropriately to peer pressure.
- c) Responds appropriately when pushed/hit by children.

Overall, there was a general trend of higher means across all social skills for the female respondents, with the exception of three questions. These items included:

- a) Produces correct schoolwork.
- b) Gives compliments to peers.
- c) Joins ongoing activity or group without being told.

## Chapter V: Discussion

This study was designed to measure parents' perceptions regarding social skills important for school success using a modified version of the *Social Skills Rating System - Teacher Form (SSRS)* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The participants in this study were parents of children in the Menomonie School District of Wisconsin. The volunteering sample consisted of 84 parents (10 male and 74 female). The parents rated their perceptions of the social skills they believed were important for their child's success in school.

### *Limitations and Merits*

The present study has a few limitations. One limitation is that the study was conducted within one small school district in Wisconsin. As such, the results should not be generalized to more urban populations. Also, the small number of men who participated in the study limits the representation of the data. Further, the participants were primarily Caucasian. Thus, the results can not be generalized to other cultural groups.

The study holds merit in that there have been extremely few studies that have examined parent perceptions regarding the importance of social skills in the school environment. Further, research examining gender differences in parental perceptions of social skills are limited.

### *Conclusions*

Results of the study indicated that the mean number of children in the families was 2.90, with a median of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 1.453. The top three pooled social skill ratings as perceived by parents were: a) follows directions, b) attends to directions, and c) controls temper in conflict situations w/adults. Results indicated significant differences by gender of the respondent regarding three social skills. The female respondents believed the following social skills were more important than the male respondents: a) appropriately questioning rules that

may be unfair; b) responding appropriately to peer pressure; and c) responding appropriately when pushed/hit by children.

The stronger endorsement of these items by females may be due to their heightened concerns about their children's responses to aggression, wanting their children to be accepted by peers, and/or wanting their children to empathize with others. Another possible explanation is that females may recognize the importance of being able to assertively respond to unfairness or aggression because the female respondents were more likely to have been the recipient of unfairness or aggression in the workplace and in society. Further, the female parents may have been more involved in their children's social upbringing. They, therefore, may be more cognizant of the importance of particular social skills. This explanation is supported by disproportionate number of female ( $n = 74$ ) versus male ( $n = 10$ ) respondents, as well.

Overall, with the exception of three questions, there was a general trend of higher means across all social skills for the female respondents. These results suggest female parents and caregivers may place more value on the importance of including social skills training within the school environment.

#### *Recommendations for Practice and Future Research*

Further questions raised in this study are whether more input from males would produce different results regarding parental perceptions of social skills. If there were more male participants, results may differ. Other studies could possibly further look at the importance of parents in the schools through the use of a needs assessment.

#### *Summary*

In summary, the purpose of this study was to determine perceptions of parents regarding the importance of certain social skills and their relations to school success for students in a

Wisconsin district. A total of 84 participants responded. A modified version of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) was used to evaluate the perceptions of parents.

Results indicated parents have different views on the importance of social skills based on the gender of the parent or guardian. These differences were found in: a) appropriately questioning rules that may be unfair; b) responding appropriately to peer pressure; and c) responding appropriately when pushed/hit by children. Results also found following directions, attending to directions, and controlling temper in conflict situations received the highest ratings by the respondent group. Further research needs to be conducted examine the perceptions of parents of social skills in the schools.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that five of the families that received a random survey also received a second survey and responded for a second child as well.

Table 1

*Parent Demographics*

Item	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	10	11.9	74	88.1
Ethnicity				
White/Caucasian	7	70.0	66	90.4
Asian American	3	30.0	3	4.1
Native American	0	0	1	1.4
Hispanic/Latino	0	0	1	1.4
Other	0	0	1	1.4
Multiracial	0	0	1	1.4
Highest Degree Held				
High School Graduate	3	30	28	38.4
B.A./B.S. Degree	4	40	21	28.8
M.A./M.S. Degree	2	20	11	15.1
Ph.D.	1	10	0	0
Other	0	0	13	17.8

Table 2

*Importance of Social Skill Items*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank
1. Controls temper in conflict situation with peers.	4.48	.719	4
2. Introduce her/himself to new people w/out being told.	3.07	.929	30
3. Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.	3.55	.767	28
4. Compromises in conflict by changing ideas to agree.	3.64	1.007	24
5. Responds appropriately to peer pressure.	4.10	1.104	14
6. Says nice things about self when appropriate.	3.83	.967	20
7. Invites others to join in activities.	4.05	.863	16
8. Uses free time in an acceptable way.	4.13	.788	10
9. Finishes class assignments w/in time limits.	4.39	.919	5
10. Makes friends easily.	3.61	.932	26
11. Responds appropriately to teasing by peers.	4.04	.813	17
12. Controls temper in conflict situations w/adults.	4.50	.720	3
13. Receives criticism well.	4.11	.892	12
14. Initiates conversations w/peers.	3.61	.865	25
15. Uses time appropriately while waiting for help.	4.00	.792	18
16. Produces correct homework.	4.21	.837	8
17. Tells you he/she thinks you've treated them unfair.	3.69	.931	22

---

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank
<hr/>			
18. Accepts peers' ideas for group activities.	3.88	.813	19
19. Gives compliments to peers.	3.60	.852	27
20. Follows directions.	4.62	.710	1
21. Puts work materials or school property away.	4.06	.910	15
22. Cooperates w/peers w/out prompting.	4.11	.745	11
23. Volunteers to help peers w/classroom tasks.	3.77	.883	21
24. Joins ongoing activity or group w/out being told.	3.67	.855	23
25. Responds appropriately when pushed/hit by children.	4.33	.751	6
26. Ignores peer distractions when doing class work.	4.19	.752	9
27. Keeps desk clean and neat w/out being reminded.	3.32	.971	29
28. Attends to your instructions.	4.52	.719	2
29. Easily makes transition from one activity to other.	4.10	.786	13
30. Gets along w/people who are different.	4.29	.800	7

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Table 3

*Gender Differences in the Perceived Importance of Social Skills*

Item	Male			Female			<i>p</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
1	4.30	.675	10	4.50	.726	74	.413
2	3.00	1.054	10	3.08	.918	74	.797
3	3.00	1.155	10	3.62	.676	74	.015*
4	3.40	.516	10	3.67	1.055	74	.428
5	3.20	1.135	10	4.22	1.050	74	.006*
6	3.60	1.075	10	3.86	.956	74	.420
7	4.00	.471	10	4.05	.905	74	.770
8	3.80	.789	10	4.18	.783	74	.158
9	4.20	1.033	10	4.42	.907	74	.483
10	3.60	1.174	10	3.61	.904	74	.980
11	3.80	.789	10	4.07	.816	74	.332
12	4.10	.738	10	4.55	.705	74	.061
13	4.10	.738	10	4.11	.915	74	.979
14	3.50	.527	10	3.62	.902	74	.679
15	3.80	.789	10	4.03	.793	74	.398
16	4.30	.949	10	4.20	.827	74	.732

Item	Male			Female			<i>p</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
17	3.20	.632	10	3.76	.948	74	.076
18	3.70	.675	10	3.91	.830	74	.456
19	3.70	.675	10	3.58	.876	74	.681
20	4.50	.527	10	4.64	.732	74	.575
21	3.80	.919	10	4.09	.909	74	.340
22	3.80	.789	10	4.15	.734	74	.166
23	3.70	.823	10	3.78	.896	74	.780
24	3.80	.789	10	3.65	.867	74	.602
25	3.80	.789	10	4.40	.721	74	.017*
26	4.10	.568	10	4.20	.776	74	.688
27	3.20	1.135	10	3.34	.955	74	.676
28	4.30	.483	10	4.55	.743	74	.297
29	3.70	.823	10	4.15	.771	74	.090
30	4.10	.568	10	4.31	.826	74	.317

\* $p \leq .05$

Table 4

*Number of Children in Family*

Children	<i>n</i>	Percent
1	8	9.5
2	32	38.1
3	24	28.6
4	10	11.9
5	4	4.8
6	4	4.8
7	0	0
8	2	2.4



## Appendix I

April 25, 2002

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Jennifer Paape. I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am conducting a survey on parental attitudes about student behaviors. I am interested in obtaining your perceptions regarding the importance of certain behaviors for students to be successful in school.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this project. By participating, valuable information will be gained from the parents and guardians of school children in the state of Wisconsin. This information will be a great asset to educators as they make efforts to design educational programs and intervention strategies.

Although your participation is voluntary, I would like you to complete a revised form of the Social Skills Rating System -Teacher Questionnaire (SSRS). The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your name will be omitted from the questionnaire, and the specific responses of individual parents will remain anonymous to the researcher as well as to others dealing with the results.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project, please complete the survey and return it to the office as soon as possible. I am *very* grateful for your time and help with this research project!

Thank you,

---

Jennifer R. Paape  
UW-Stout, Graduate Student

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Jacalyn Weissenburger  
Assistant Professor

### **Informed Consent:**

I understand that by completing this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be achieved from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse my participation at any time during the study. Furthermore, I understand that the results of the study only will be reported on a group basis.

Questions or concerns about participation in the study should be addressed to the research advisor, Jacalyn Weissenburger (715-232-1326), and second to UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751.

## Appendix II

## Social Skills Questionnaire

**Directions:**

This questionnaire is designed to measure **how important** some behaviors **are for a child to be successful in school**. Read each item below (items 1-30) and rate **how important** each behavior is **for a child to be successful in school**.

If the behavior is **not important** for success in school, circle the 1.

If the behavior is **somewhat important** for success in school, circle the 3.

If the behavior is **critical** for success in school, circle the 5.

**Please do not skip any items.**

	Not Important		How Important? Somewhat Important		Critical
1. Controls temper in conflict situations with peers.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Responds appropriately to peer pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Says nice things about himself or herself when appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Invites others to join in activities.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Uses free time in an acceptable way.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Finishes class assignments within time limits.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Makes friends easily.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Responds appropriately to teasing by peers.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Controls temper in conflict situations with adults.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Receives criticism well.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Initiates conversations with peers.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Uses time appropriately while waiting for help.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Produces correct schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Appropriately tells the teacher when he or she thinks the teacher has treated him or her unfairly.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Accepts peers' ideas for group activities.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Gives compliments to peers.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Follows the teachers' directions.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Puts work materials or school property away.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Cooperates with peers without prompting.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Volunteers to help peers with classroom tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Joins ongoing activity or group without being told to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Ignores peer distractions when doing class work.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Keeps desk clean and neat without being reminded.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Attends to teacher's instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Gets along with people who are different.	1	2	3	4	5

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**Stop. Please make sure all items have been marked.**

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:**

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Order (indicate child's initials only)	Gender	Age	Grade	Receiving Special Educational Services? If yes, what disability category?
1.				
2.				

3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				

What is your (the respondent's) ethnicity?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian | <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian American  | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____    |   |

Your (the respondent's) gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Type and size of school district:

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inner city   | <input type="checkbox"/> 0 to 499 students enrolled in the district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban     | <input type="checkbox"/> 500-999                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rural        | <input type="checkbox"/> 1000 or greater                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CESA         | <input type="checkbox"/> CESA                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                               |

Your (the respondent's) highest degree:

- ☐ High School Diploma  
☐ B.A./B.S.  
☐ M.A./M.S.  
☐ Ed.S.  
☐ Ph.D.  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation!**

**Please use this page to include any further comments regarding this survey:**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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